

# London Borough of Wandsworth

## Re-inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers

Inspection date: 8 May to 31 May 2018

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<b>Children's services in Wandsworth require improvement to be good</b>	
<b>1. Children who need help and protection</b>	Requires improvement
<b>2. Children looked after and achieving permanence</b>	Requires improvement
2.1 Adoption performance	Requires improvement
2.2 Experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
<b>3. Leadership, management and governance</b>	Requires improvement

## Executive summary

This was a re-inspection of children's services in Wandsworth, as the last inspection in December 2015 judged the local authority to be inadequate overall. Senior leaders have worked diligently to strengthen the quality of children's services, implementing recommendations and learning from their improvement plan, quality assurance activities and seven Ofsted monitoring visits. Significant financial investment and an understanding by senior leaders of the strengths and areas for development within the service have underpinned the improvements to the quality of help and support provided to children and families across most areas, and no aspects of the service have been judged inadequate.

Children in need of help and protection are now identified quickly, and support for them is effective in reducing risks. Disabled children receive a good social work service, and services to care leavers have improved from inadequate to good. However, the quality of practice and the need to continue to stabilise the workforce remain a challenge, as the pace and impact of change have not been sufficient to achieve consistent improvements to social work help and support for children across all services. This includes longer-term child protection planning and pre-proceedings, early permanence, including those children with a plan for adoption, and strengthening support for some vulnerable adolescents.

Effective action by the strategic partnership has resulted in the identification of shared priorities and has led to the commissioning of a good range of accessible services to improve outcomes for children and their families. The corporate parenting board, which was established following the inspection in 2015, is effective, and children's views actively influence new service developments. However, progress has been slow to identify and meet the initial health needs of children in care.

The strategic partnership response to child sexual exploitation and to those children who go missing is well established and identifies those children at risk. Developments across partner agencies to widen and coordinate this approach, to include children at risk of gang affiliation and criminal exploitation, are very recent and it is too early to show impact. Newly implemented safety plans for children most at risk are comprehensive. However, practice in convening complex strategy meetings for vulnerable adolescents is underdeveloped. This means that information sharing and actions to reduce risks are not always well co-ordinated, timely or effective.

Children and families have access to timely early help support. The range of early help services has been strengthened, with effective pathways into social care enabling families to experience continuity of support when children's needs increase. Thresholds are clearly understood by partners, and children are promptly and appropriately protected when concerns first arise.

Effective decision-making and management oversight ensure that child protection concerns are dealt with immediately. Since the last inspection, there has been considerable progress in police participation in strategy discussions. Further work is required to ensure that other partners, particularly health partners, contribute to these meetings.

Assessments of children's needs are timely but are of variable quality. Since the last inspection, initial child protection planning has become more timely and plans are appropriate. Recent pre-proceedings work demonstrates improving practice. However, there has been drift in initiating legal planning meetings for a small number of children who have had child protection plans in place for some time. The oversight of child protection conference chairs is continuing to strengthen, although this is not always challenging enough to ensure that all children's circumstances improve. Not enough planning involves children and not enough children have the support of an advocate. Private fostering practice is inconsistent for children and carers, and management oversight of these arrangements is ineffective.

Children in care live in safe, good-quality homes with committed carers who are able to meet their needs. Children are well supported by a range of specialist services and achieve well at school. Children regularly see their social worker, although some children have had frequent changes of social worker, which delays the development of effective relationships and planning. The quality of assessments varies from inadequate to good. Children's reviews are regular, and children are supported well to fully participate in and contribute to their reviews. Wandsworth's Children Living In Care Council (CLICK) is strong and very effective; it enables children to participate fully in a range of activities and support groups, and to influence policy development.

Early permanence planning is still underdeveloped, leading to delays for some children to be placed with adoptive or permanent carers. Family finding arrangements and matching of children to adoptive and long-term foster carers or permanent carers are not always timely.

The quality of services for care leavers has greatly improved. Care leavers are supported well and make good progress. There is a wide range of suitable and safe accommodation. A good proportion of care leavers move into education, training or employment. However, transition arrangements from children in care teams to the care leavers' service are not fully effective.

Performance information is routinely used to ensure compliance with key indicators and to manage improvements, although adoption data is not yet reliable enough. The quality assurance framework is not yet fully aligned with performance information and there is insufficient focus on the quality and impact of social work practice. Senior managers recognise that further improvements are required.

The social care workforce is becoming increasingly more stable. However, turnover in some teams is having a detrimental impact on some children who experience too many changes of workers and managers, thus impeding the progress of their plans.

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## Information about this local authority area<sup>1</sup>

### Previous Ofsted inspections

- The local authority operates one children's home. This was judged to be good at its most recent Ofsted inspection.
- The last inspection report for the local authority's children's services was published in December 2015. The judgements for the local authority were:
  - Overall effectiveness: Inadequate
  - Children who need help and protection: Inadequate
  - Children looked after and achieving permanence: Requires improvement
    - Adoption performance: Requires improvement
    - Experiences and progress of care leavers: Inadequate
  - Leadership, management and governance: Inadequate.
- Ofsted carried out seven monitoring visits between July 2016 and May 2018. These visits focused on various aspects of the inspection framework. Monitoring visits do not result in inspection judgements.

### Local leadership

- The director of children's services has been in post since April 2014.
- The chief executive has been in post since October 2010.
- The chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board has been in post since July 2011.

### Children living in this area

- Approximately 62,000 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Wandsworth. This is 20% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 20% of the local authority's children aged under 16 years are living in low income families.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
  - in primary schools is 17% (the national average is 14%)
  - in secondary schools is 16% (the national average is 13%).
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 43% of all children living in the area, compared with 21% in the country as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> The local authority was given the opportunity to review this section of the report and has updated it with local unvalidated data where this was available.

- The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are Black African and Pakistani.
- The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language:
  - in primary schools is 46% (the national average is 21%)
  - in secondary schools is 45% (the national average is 16%).

### **Child protection in this area**

- At 31 March 2018, 1,639 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is a reduction from 2,268 at 31 March 2017.
- At 31 March 2018, 288 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan (a rate of 46 per 10,000 children). This is a reduction from 401 (65 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2017.
- At 31 March 2018, five children lived in privately arranged fostering placements. This is an increase from four at 31 March 2017.
- In the two years before this inspection, eight serious incident notifications were submitted to Ofsted and one serious case review was completed.
- There was one serious case review ongoing at the time of the inspection. This is being carried out by another local authority with support from Wandsworth.

### **Children looked after in this area**

- At 31 March 2018, 306 children were being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 49 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 286 (46 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2017. Of this number:
  - 168 (or 55%) live outside the local authority area
  - 37 live in residential children's homes, of whom 86% live outside the authority area
  - 194 live with foster families, of whom 69% live outside the authority area
  - five live with parents
  - 16 children are unaccompanied asylum-seekers.
- In the last 12 months:
  - there have been nine adoptions
  - 12 children became the subject of special guardianship orders
  - 180 children ceased to be looked after, of whom 4% subsequently returned to be looked after
  - 68 young people ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living

— one young person ceased to be looked after and is now living in a house of multiple occupation.

The casework model used in this local authority is signs of safety.

## Recommendations

1. Continue to strengthen the contributions of relevant agencies to strategy meetings, including complex strategy meetings for vulnerable adolescents.
2. Develop the multi-agency response to children who are at risk of sexual exploitation or of going missing to include those at risk of criminal exploitation and gang affiliation, and ensure that the impact of intervention is analysed and clearly recorded.
3. Strengthen decision-making, management oversight and tracking arrangements to progress children's plans, including the use of legal planning meetings and the effectiveness of pre-proceedings activity. Ensure that this translates into timely action for all children when risks are not reducing.
4. Ensure that early permanence arrangements and strategic oversight are robust, so that children who cannot return home benefit from continuity, security and belonging through effective permanence planning.
5. Ensure that the systems and processes for family finding and matching of children who require permanence and adoption are timely and effective in identifying families who can meet children and young people's needs.
6. Ensure that the joint working arrangements between the local authority and the health provider are effective so that the health and well-being of children in care are promoted and that all children receive timely initial health assessments and dental checks.
7. Align performance information with the quality assurance framework to support, identify and prioritise areas for improvement. Ensure that performance information and quality assurance have a stronger impact on the quality and consistency of social work practice, so that children's experiences and the impact of intervention can be better understood, and plans more effectively targeted.
8. Increase the take up of independent advocacy services for children on child protection plans and ensure that children's views are always heard and considered at child protection conferences.
9. Improve the timeliness of transitions for children into the care leavers' service to ensure that all children receive the help and support that they need.



## Summary for children and young people

- Services to support children in need of help and protection and care leavers in Wandsworth are much better than they were at the last inspection in 2015. Many children and families now receive help at an early stage, which helps to stop problems from getting worse.
- When difficulties arise, staff work well together to protect children, but more needs to be done to help those teenagers who are most at risk in order to protect them from harm.
- Some social work assessments and plans are not good enough. This makes it harder for families to understand what needs to change to make things better. It sometimes takes too long to improve things for children.
- Social workers spend time with children, listening to their views and any worries that they may have. However, some children have had too many changes of social worker, making it hard for them to build a trusting relationship. This is gradually improving for children as staff turnover is reducing.
- When children go missing from home or care, and when they are at risk of being harmed by adults in the community, social workers and workers in other agencies are working together better to find them and to help them. More is being done to make sure that children who are at risk of getting involved in crime get the help that they need.
- Children and young people only come into care if they cannot live safely at home with their families. It is taking too long to sort out permanent arrangements for some children who cannot live with their families, and this includes children who have a plan for adoption. This means that not all children are confident about the permanency of their living arrangements.
- Foster carers provide good support and care, but only a small number of young people live with their foster families after they are 18 years old.
- Children in care are doing well in education and receive good support to achieve their best.
- Most care leavers live in good-quality accommodation, and they feel safe there. They are helped to learn the skills that they need to live independently and they have their own tenancies, which they value. Care leavers get on well with their personal advisers and social workers and many of them are doing well in education, employment or training.

<p><b>The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection</b></p>	<p><b>Requires improvement to be good</b></p>
<p><b>Summary</b></p> <p>Services have significantly improved since the inspection in December 2015, although the quality of social work practice is not yet consistently good. For the vast majority of children who need protection, action is timely and they are safeguarded from further harm. For a very small number of children with longer-standing plans, there are delays in taking action to protect them.</p> <p>Children and families have good access to early help support when needs first emerge. The range of early help services has been strengthened to provide more 'whole family', targeted support. However, not all children have a comprehensive early help assessment. Well-coordinated pathways between early help and social care enable continuity of support and reduce the need for repeat assessments.</p> <p>Thresholds are now well understood by partners. When concerns first arise, children are protected promptly by the initial point of contact (IPOC) team. Child protection concerns are passed immediately to assessment teams. There has been considerable progress in the frequency of police participation in strategy discussions, although less so with other agencies, particularly health partners.</p> <p>Children needing an assessment are now visited promptly by social workers and assessments are informed by direct work with them. The vast majority of assessments result in clear plans and access to specialist services, meaning that circumstances improve for most children. However, the quality of assessments for children exposed to neglectful parenting and domestic abuse remains inconsistent.</p> <p>Initial child protection conferences are now timely. Oversight by conference chairs is developing, but is not always sufficiently challenging when there is no improvement to children's circumstances. The number of children who participate in their planning is low and not enough children have access to the support of an advocate. Recent pre-proceedings work is improving, but some plans still show evidence of drift.</p> <p>Risks to young people from sexual exploitation are effectively assessed and tracked. Increasing numbers of children have timely return home interviews, but take-up by young people at high risk is too low. The aim of the recently introduced risk and safety plans is to improve responses to wider exploitation, but it is too early to see any sustained impact for children.</p> <p>Support for children who are privately fostered and their carers is too variable, and there is insufficient management oversight. Disabled children receive a good social work service; when child protection concerns arise, action is taken to ensure that they are safeguarded.</p>	

## Inspection findings

10. There is a wide range of early help provision, and children are able to benefit from timely support when difficulties emerge. Partners are committed to leading 'team around the child' planning when children have lower-level needs. However, not all assessments of children's needs are comprehensive at the outset and, as a result, some plans do not consider the underlying causes of difficulties or the wider family context for the child. This also means that children's own voices and views are not routinely captured in all cases.
11. Management oversight is effective, and step-up and step-down arrangements are well-coordinated when children move between early help and social care if risks diminish or escalate. As a result, most families experience a continuity of service which is proportionate to risk.
12. Children are protected effectively when concerns first arise. Contacts are promptly processed within the IPOC team, and the application of thresholds at the 'front door' draws on evidence from the mapping both of strengths and areas of concern. Immediate child protection concerns are passed promptly to the referral and assessment service.
13. Partners have reported an improved experience when they raise concerns about children through the IPOC, including receiving feedback on outcomes of referrals. Thresholds are well understood across the partnership and the number of children being re-referred is reducing. For children who do not meet the threshold for social care, there is an innovative 'keep in touch' service offering phone-based support and signposting. Although recently implemented, this is showing some early positive impact.
14. Children needing an assessment are now visited promptly. However, the quality of social work assessments remains inconsistent, ranging from inadequate to good. In the majority of assessments, the rationale for decision-making is clear and this leads to more robust planning. Assessments now routinely draw on direct work with children. However, the views of professionals around risk and needs are not consistently included in the assessments for some children, and there is an overreliance on parental reporting. Children's cultural identity is not fully explored within all assessments, although the cultural needs of parents are more consistently recognised and supported. In a small number of assessments seen by inspectors, social work analysis was weaker in identifying the unmet needs and risks to children and, as a result, did not inform clear safety goals or enable meaningful change for children and their families.
15. Risks for children exposed to the effects of neglect and domestic abuse are recognised, but practice in this area is too variable, with inconsistent safety planning and a reliance on written agreements. This area for improvement in practice had already been recognised by managers, and new approaches to enhance safer relationships within families are being developed. Substance

misuse workers and mental health workers within the family recovery project provide intensive support to families, improving parents' ability to recognise and meet the needs of their children. An increasing number of families with complex substance misuse issues benefit from the intensive support through participation in the Family Drug and Alcohol Court.

16. Child in need plans set out clear safety goals for children and specific, time-bound actions for how they will be achieved. For most children, circumstances get better and risk is reduced. Child in need reviews are timely and, in the majority of cases, well attended by partner agencies, including adult mental health professionals. Direct work with children is regularly completed during social work visits, but it is not always purposeful or linked to safety goals. As a result, children's views about what is getting better are not consistently represented within reviews of their plans.
17. When children are at risk of significant harm, they are, in most cases, identified and protected. Strategy discussions do not routinely include input from key partners other than the police. In particular, they do not routinely include input from health partners. As a result, decisions are not informed by a wider understanding of children's vulnerabilities, and section 47 enquiries cannot take full account of all key information. Very recent progress has been made on this, but it is at an early stage. (Recommendation)
18. Initial child protection conferences are now timely. Most conferences are well chaired, but few children participate in their conference or have the support of an advocate. Child protection plans set out clear danger statements and safety goals that are child focused. Children are consistently seen by their social workers at intervals set by their plan. The plans for the majority of children progress, and risk is reduced. Safe adults from the child's wider family are included in family network meetings. Reviews are timely, well attended by parents and partners, and capture the child's experience as well as the progress against safety goals. (Recommendation)
19. Child protection conference chairs are providing increasing challenge through consultation meetings with social workers. Inspectors saw recent escalations when planning was not sufficiently effective in reducing risks to children. This is showing some impact, such as fewer children having repeat or long-term child protection plans. However, the impact is not consistent for all children.
20. Practice in pre-proceedings work is inconsistent, despite this being an area of focus in a monitoring visit in March 2017. In better recent cases, it is leading to more timely action, protecting children from further harm. The delay seen in a small number of cases was despite oversight and case direction from managers and conference chairs. As a result of these delays, these children continued to live in circumstances where it was known that their needs were not being adequately met by their parents. More recently, tracking meetings to review cases are resulting in fewer delays for children, but more work is

required to embed these changes and to strengthen work with conference chairs and first line managers.

21. A small number of children who have been subject to child in need and child protection plans for some time have continued to experience significant delay in being protected from further harm, including a lack of urgency in initiating legal planning when required. For these children, management oversight of longer-term cases failed to translate into decisive action. Case work supervision by team managers was not effective in identifying weak practice and addressing delays for children. (Recommendation)
22. Disabled children receive a good social work service and when there are child protection concerns, action is taken to ensure that they are safeguarded. Disabled children have the benefit of sensitive direct work during social work visits. Robust management oversight ensures that children's plans continue to address their needs.
23. Children who go missing from home are routinely offered a timely return home interview. Young people who repeatedly go missing are now allocated their own 'missing' workers, who are tenacious in keeping in touch during and after missing episodes. This is having some early impact for young people who were previously hard to engage. However, not enough young people at high risk participate in return home interviews and information from interviews is not routinely used in risk and safety planning.
24. Children at risk of sexual exploitation are now consistently identified. Tracking children through the sexual exploitation multi-agency panel (SEMAP) results in a timely offer to young people of targeted support, including therapeutic support. However, because young people at high risk are not being successfully engaged, their plans are not yet helping to make them safe. For a very small number of children, the risks from criminal exploitation and county lines have not been fully recognised. Current assessments tools, plans and interventions do not sufficiently integrate risks from wider criminal exploitation and gang affiliation.
25. Children who are privately fostered have received an inconsistent social work service. For some children, their legal status and safeguarding issues were not appropriately considered. The local authority is re-organising this area of work in June 2018 to improve accountability and management oversight.
26. Young people aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless are not offered a sufficient range of support as children in need, such as alternatives to accommodation as a 'looked after' child. As a result, some vulnerable young people do not get the help that they need in a timely way. Mediation and edge-of-care support have successfully helped other young people to remain living safely within their families.

27. There are clear policies and procedures in relation to children missing education or who are electively home educated. Appropriate steps are taken to assess the suitability of the education provided for children who are home educated. When it is considered that children are not receiving a suitable education, cases are appropriately escalated to relevant professionals. However, for a small number of children, action is not always timely and, as a result, there is not enough up-to-date knowledge about their circumstances.
28. When children are identified as being at risk of radicalisation, they receive support which is proportionate to risk. A highly knowledgeable 'Prevent' co-ordinator undertakes joint work with social workers, as well as direct work with a small number of children. There has been a significant fall in the number of children being identified as at risk of female genital mutilation, despite clear referral pathways; the reasons for this are not yet understood across the partnership.
29. Local multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) panels maintain a strong focus on risks to children. Children's social workers routinely refer victims, including 16- and 17-year olds, to MARAC, resulting in specialist services from housing and community groups addressing risks from domestic abuse. Actions agreed are flagged in children's own records and monitored in case supervision.
30. The 'out of hours' social work service is effective, providing timely and comprehensive support with a focus on prioritising child protection.
31. Arrangements for managing allegations against professionals have been improved since the previous inspection through the creation of a dedicated designated officer role. Oversight and risk management are effective, feedback from partner agencies is positive, and individual children who may be at risk are appropriately identified and protected.

**The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence**

**Requires improvement to be good**

**Summary**

Decisions for children to come into the care of the local authority are mostly timely. Support for vulnerable families and children on the edge of care is helping children to remain at home. When the plan is for children to return home, children are mostly prepared well, which gives children and families the best chance of a successful reunification.

Children are regularly seen by their social workers, who listen to their views, and this is mostly reflected in their case records. Some children have had frequent changes of social worker, which delays children developing effective relationships with workers who know them. Assessments vary in quality. Children’s care plans are detailed, but early permanence planning is underdeveloped. Family finding arrangements are not clearly recorded to evidence activity, and matching of children to long-term foster placements is not always timely. The recruitment, assessment, training and support for foster carers are strong. Children live in safe, good-quality placements that meet their needs.

Children’s reviews are timely, and children are supported well to fully participate and contribute to their reviews. The arrangements for initial health assessments and dental health checks are not well established, leading to delays in children receiving medical oversight when they are first looked after. There are appropriate systems in place to respond to children who go missing, but the impact of intervention to ensure that children at high risk are safer is not always recorded. Transitions into the care leavers’ service are not sufficiently timely.

CLICK is effective and is continuing to develop. CLICK’s contribution to policy work is impressive.

When the plan for children is adoption, children are placed with adopters who can meet their needs. Improvements to the timeliness of placing children for adoption have been slow, and some children still wait too long to be matched and to move into their adoptive families. A full range of post-adoption support is available to children, adoptive parents and birth families.

Care leavers are supported well by personal advisers and specialist staff, who help them to progress in many aspects of their lives. As a result, an increasing proportion move into education, training and employment. Many children in care and care leavers achieve well as a result of the individual support that they receive. A strong programme of leisure and social activities helps children and young people to build their confidence and to develop their work-related skills and aspirations effectively.

## Inspection findings

32. Decisions to look after children are based on an appropriate assessment of need. The targeted support to vulnerable families means that children are increasingly supported to remain with their families and only come into care when this is in their best interest. However, for some children, the lack of decisive intervention and management oversight result in delay and missed opportunities to intervene early.
33. Children are regularly seen and seen alone by social workers. Overall, case records of visits reflect observations and discussions and include children's views and wishes. In stable teams, social workers know children well and demonstrate an understanding of children's plans. Purposeful social work and child-centred work seen, including direct work with children, were age appropriate and undertaken sensitively. However, the high turnover of social workers has been a longstanding challenge and has had a particular impact on a recently established children looked after team. This has resulted in some children having frequent changes of social workers, which delays children developing effective relationships with workers who know them.
34. The timeliness of proceedings is in line with the national average. Frequent meetings are held with the judiciary, who report improvement in the quality of court work since the last inspection. Communication between the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) and the local authority is infrequent, but plans are in place to improve this. Tracking arrangements were put in place in March 2018 to monitor and review all children subject to the public law outline process and permanence planning, to ensure that all children achieve permanence without delay. The tracker is comprehensive. However, it is too early to fully demonstrate impact for children.
35. Care plans set out the needs and experiences of children well, but contingency planning is not yet routine. Assessments are routinely updated to take account of children's changing circumstances for children looked after review meetings, and they generally reflect the views and wishes of children. Early permanence planning is underdeveloped, despite this being a recommendation at the previous inspection and the focus of a monitoring visit, and with support from an external agency. While priority is given to ensuring that all children have a plan for permanence by the second statutory review, the pace of change in securing early permanence has been too slow. This means that there is delay for some children in having the benefit of continuity, commitment and a sense of belonging. (Recommendation)
36. The joint arrangements for responding to children missing and at risk of sexual exploitation are established and underpinned by clear protocols on the management of risk. Most children who go missing from care are offered a return home interview and take-up is relatively high (74% of children took up offers in March 2018). Recent developments in April 2018, including two new 'missing' workers, are now in place to improve this further. The quality of



recording of return home interviews is variable, with some being weak. Children identified as being at high-risk and with complex needs receive a timely response and risk is regularly reviewed. However, the impact of joint work on securing children's welfare and safety is not always clear and management oversight is not sufficiently rigorous.

37. The arrangements for children to return home from care are mostly robust and are underpinned by an assessment of need and risk. When children are subject to court proceedings, the plans to return children home are well considered. The timescales for reunification are framed around children's and families' needs. Plans for children to return home are mostly signed off by a senior manager and reviewed by the child's independent reviewing officer (IRO). This process supports families to make the necessary changes and gives the best chance of a successful reunification. In a small number of cases, when children chose to return home prematurely, they were not always effectively supported or visited by their social workers, and potential risks were unassessed.
38. The quality of assessments seen by inspectors was inconsistent, but improving. Stronger assessments, including applications to court and updated children looked after assessments, are multi-agency, comprehensive and child centred. They consider and analyse risks and take account of the child's history. Children's needs arising from their culture, religious beliefs and ethnicity are suitably considered. This results in clear recommendations, plans and intervention. In weaker assessments, reference to children's identity is often limited, and risk is not rigorously analysed from the child's perspective or lived experiences. In some instances, there is an optimistic view of risk and parents' capacity to meet children's needs. The quality of 'together or apart' assessments is mixed, with stronger assessments reflecting a clear analysis of children's needs. In poorer assessments, analysis is weak and the rationale for decisions is not clear.
39. Arrangements for the completion of statutory initial health assessments for children in care from March 2017 to April 2018 were poor. While there has been a marked improvement in the number of initial health assessments completed since July 2017, this has not yet benefited all children. Until the joint working arrangement between the local authority and the health provider is strengthened, continued progress is vulnerable. The majority of children have had a recent dental health check, but improvements are not yet embedded. The child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) provision for children and young people is good and extends to children placed out of area. For children with complex needs, including children with health, behavioural and emotional needs, extensive efforts are made to ensure that appropriate support, including therapeutic support, is provided to carers and parents. (Recommendation)
40. The virtual school team maintains good oversight of the progress made by children in care. Staff develop positive relationships with children and get to

know their individual needs and circumstances well. They use this information to put in place effective additional support, such as mentoring, extra-curricular activities and one-to-one academic support. This helps many children in care to achieve well and to make good progress from their starting points. The large majority of children in care attend school regularly and go to a good school. As a result of early intervention by the virtual school and appropriate use of managed moves, the number of fixed-term exclusions is reducing. The virtual school team works effectively with schools and foster carers to develop strategies that promote the education of children in care.

41. A high proportion of children in care have a good quality, up-to-date personal education plan that captures their views well and maps their next steps in learning. Using the pupil premium, staff at the virtual school have developed a strong programme of leisure and social activities that helps to build children's self-confidence, develops their work-related skills and builds their aspirations for the future. Staff have an up-to-date picture of the small number of children missing education. For those children without a school place, home tuition is promptly put in place. Staff at the virtual school maintain good oversight of the small number of children in alternative provision and take timely action when the education provided does not meet children's needs.
42. Most children are living in good quality, safe placements with carers who meet their needs. Children's contact with their family is promoted when this is in their best interest. When appropriate, brothers and sisters are placed together. The local authority has increased the range of placement choice for children in care through joint work with housing. This includes the development of a children's home that is due to be opened later this year. Children benefit from long-term stability, and increasing numbers of children are being placed locally. This enables them to remain or settle in local schools, maintain friendships with peers, retain family ties and engage in local activities. However, too many children still live away from their local area. While this remains an area of development, the local authority is actively addressing this through its commissioning strategy.
43. The recruitment, assessment, training and support of foster carers are strong. The local authority has increased the number and types of foster carers since the last inspection, including kinship carers and special guardians. This has resulted in an additional 19 in-house foster carers being recruited over the last 12 months. The recruitment strategy is underpinned by a revised financial and intensive support package to foster carers to help them to meet the needs of older children with complex needs. Foster carers' assessment reports are thorough and provide a good appraisal of carers' suitability to meet children's needs. All statutory checks and references are undertaken. The role of the fostering panel in relation to quality assuring practice is strong, and recommendations to the agency decision-maker are implemented within timescales. Signed foster care agreements are in place and areas of delegated authority are routinely discussed. Supervising social workers visit regularly and there is a wide range of training available to carers. Foster carers overall

spoke very highly of the training, support and resources made available to them and feel that they are part of the planning process for children and young people in their care.

44. The arrangements for matching children who are waiting for long-term foster carers are not robust, despite this being identified as an area for improvement at the 2015 inspection. The systems for monitoring and reviewing family finding activity are complex and do not provide for a holistic view of activities or steps taken to meet the individual matching needs of children with suitable carers. The new permanence tracker enables better scrutiny and monitoring by senior officers, but the impact has yet to be demonstrated.  
(Recommendation)
45. Reviews of children in care are timely and child focused. Children and young people are supported to attend their reviews. They are also seen between reviews, and children spoken to said that they knew how to contact their IRO. Progress against plans is monitored. However, there was a lack of challenge by IROs. For example, the delay in children achieving early permanence is not always sufficiently challenged. The role of the IRO has recently changed so that IROs no longer chair child protection conferences and concentrate only on children in care to promote more specialist knowledge and expertise. IRO caseloads are below national guidelines, which gives continuity to children, particularly those who have experienced changes in social workers. Mentors and advocates are available to children as appropriate to help them to participate and contribute to their reviews.
46. Many children and young people from six years old upwards are actively involved in CLICK, and this includes children placed out of area. The children and young people who met with inspectors were committed and articulate and were positive role models for all children. They value the regular meetings with strategic leaders, who listen to their views and act on their behalf. CLICK is actively involved in a range of activities, including residential trips, the re-design of the new children's home and the commissioning specification for care leavers' accommodation. CLICK members have been involved in the recruitment of strategic leaders and the training of foster carers, and have contributed significantly to policy development for children in care. For example, the Corporate Parent Action Plan 2018 has a bright and vibrant design and the one-page plan sets out the council's objectives clearly. The range and reach of CLICK work demonstrate notable and sustained achievements.
47. Children know how to complain and have access to an advocate and independent visitor. Children spoke very warmly of independent visitors and enjoy undertaking leisure pursuits with them, such as going for a meal or to the cinema. Interpreters appropriate to the individual language needs of children and their families are used regularly to promote effective communication.

**The graded judgement for adoption performance is that it requires improvement to be good**

48. Adoption is considered for all children who are unable to live with their birth families, although the numbers of children adopted in the past three years have fluctuated. Recent changes to improve early permanence arrangements have resulted in children being identified for adoption earlier. However, these arrangements are not well established and still require further embedding to ensure that children's plans for early permanence are consistently progressed.
49. All children who have an adoption plan are monitored by the adoption team, who manually record and update children's progress. However, these arrangements for performance monitoring and tracking of children are not sufficiently rigorous to enable effective strategic oversight. Changes to strengthen adoption performance information and tracking to ensure accuracy have been implemented recently, but it is too early to measure the impact of this.
50. The timeliness of placing children for adoption is showing some recent improvements. However, progress since the last inspection is inconsistent and slow. The service has recently achieved success in the adoption of some children with a long legacy of drift and delay. Nine children left care through adoption in 2017–18.
51. The local authority continues to pursue adoptive placements for children who are hard to place. Permanence planning is now starting at an earlier stage and children are quickly allocated a family finder. When the current care plan is clearly for adoption, children are placed in a timely way. However, some children are still subject to some delays before they are suitably matched with adopters. The time between the local authority obtaining a placement order and matching with an adoptive family has fluctuated in recent years. There is evidence that, more recently, there has been an increase in the pace at which children have been matched with adoptive families. In the last year, there have been two successful foster-to-adopt placements, and prospective adopters are now routinely and anonymously linked as potential matches to waiting children, prior to panel approval.
52. Prospective adopter enquiries have increased from 74 in 2016–17 to 125 in 2017–2018. There is more work to do to improve the timeliness of the prospective adopters' assessment processes. Some delays have been compounded by panel cancellations, leaving adopters and children waiting longer for approvals and matching. Managers are aware that more work is required to increase the range of suitable adopters to meet its own internal

targets for recruitment and to ensure that children are matched and placed more quickly.

53. The quality of the prospective adopter reports (PARs) is good and the evidence is thorough. Reflective assessments contain an analysis of the prospective adopters' strengths and vulnerabilities. The prospective adopters come from a range of diverse backgrounds, with a variety of parenting experiences. Adopters who spoke to inspectors were extremely positive about their experiences of preparation and assessment. Support provided at each stage is valued, preparing them and instilling confidence in their ability to meet their adopted children's needs.
54. Child permanence records (CPRs) are completed to a satisfactory standard. While some are more comprehensive and up to date than others, they all present a detailed picture of the child, clearly setting out the reasons why children are unable to live with their family and the plan for adoption. This has enabled the adoption and permanence panel to make sound and considered recommendations when matching children. There have not been any adoption placement breakdowns within the past year. Children are routinely placed together with their brothers and sisters. When it is not possible to place children together, thorough attention is paid to maintaining contact.
55. A highly knowledgeable and experienced chair leads a strong and effective adoption and permanence panel. The panel has developed since the last inspection. For example, panel minutes clearly evidence a full appraisal of the information presented and consideration of potential issues. All attendees are well prepared and supported to give their views. Panel quality assurance processes are robust and well embedded, with the panel chair providing written feedback on the quality of PARs and CPRs while also routinely inviting feedback from panel attendees. The panel chair draws out important generic issues and recommendations from panel meetings. These issues feed into the quarterly agency decision-maker (ADM) and chair's meeting, and inform practice improvements.
56. The ADM competently discharges her duties and ensures that panel chairs and arrangements are effective. Panel documentation and minutes are scrutinised by the ADM before she reaches her approval decisions. While the ADM's responses are timely, her thoroughness is not evident in the letters sent to prospective adopters as they do not provide enough detail to understand the reasons for panel recommendations or the ADM decision.
57. Social workers work with children to help them to understand their family history and to prepare them for moving in with their adoptive families. Life-story work and later-life letters provide children with detailed information about their history and explain the reasons for their adoption. Most of this work is very child focused, using pictures to tell the child's history. Others, while containing relevant information, are not as appropriate for the ages of the children they are written for. Adoptive carers continue to gather

information to help to inform their children's understanding of their history, drawing on the support of the post-permanence support service when required.

58. A wide range of specialist post-adoption support is available, including specialist commissioned services and activities for children, their adopters, carers and special guardians. Responses to children's emerging needs are effective. Recent support plans are comprehensive and are based on the emerging needs of the child. However, when children and families are receiving ongoing support, plans are not routinely reviewed to ensure that they remain effective. Adults who have been adopted, as well as birth families, are provided with a range of support options, including bespoke counselling and support with contact arrangements. In 2017–18, 26 children were supported to successfully claim adoption support funding for therapeutic services.

**The graded judgement about the experience and progress of care leavers is that it is good**

59. Since the previous inspection, senior leaders and managers have taken determined and effective action to improve the support provided to young people leaving care. In September 2017, the leaving care team (Future First) was brought back in-house. Senior leaders and managers have invested well to increase the capacity of the team by employing additional specialist staff to promote young people's mental health and their next steps in education, training and employment.
60. Personal advisers provide effective support for young people that helps them to develop the skills that they need to live independently and to manage their day-to-day lives. Personal advisers see young people regularly and young people who spoke to inspectors said that they feel that their personal advisers care about them and are accessible when they need them.
61. Planning generally reflects the current needs and circumstances of young people, and personal advisers and managers are quick to implement new strategies to respond to young people's changing circumstances. Young people's pathway plans are up to date, and in the best examples they represent young people's views very well, are personal to them and comprehensively cover all aspects of young people's lives.
62. The large majority of young people live in safe and suitable accommodation. Young people who spoke to inspectors reported that they feel safe where they live. The range of accommodation available to young people is good. This includes two training flats, a crash-pad for use in emergencies, a range of semi-independent placements and a good supply of permanent tenancies for young people who are ready to live independently. Bed and breakfast

accommodation, in use at the time of the previous inspection, is no longer considered as an option for young people.

63. Most young people receive effective support that helps them to develop the skills that they need to live independently. Personal advisers provide practical help that improves young people's ability to manage their finances and claim their benefits and entitlements. In a few instances, key-work support for young people in semi-independent placements to help them to develop the skills that they need to live independently was insufficient to meet their needs.
64. Young people are involved very well in the design and development of services for themselves and other young people leaving care. A vibrant and active group of young people (Future Voice) is increasingly helping to shape services. A well-equipped 'hub' at the leaving care offices has been developed, at which young people can see their personal adviser and gain specialist support in a relaxed environment.
65. A clear 'offer' to young people has been developed with them that sets out their entitlements to support and help. Young people who spoke to inspectors were aware of their entitlements and knew who to turn to should they be dissatisfied with any aspect of the support that they were receiving.
66. Since the previous inspection, senior leaders have improved young people's access to mental health support. A specialist post to support young people's emotional health and tackle substance misuse is increasing the number of young people, but particularly young men, getting support for their mental health. Most young people have access to the health services that they need, and are registered with their local doctors and dentist. The majority of care leavers have access to their health histories.
67. Effective action by leaders and managers is improving opportunities for young people to develop the skills that they need for work and to achieve their aspirations. Five new apprenticeship posts within the local authority demonstrate the strong corporate commitment to care leavers. A well-used work experience programme ensures that young people develop their self-confidence and skills for employment.
68. Support for young people's education, training and employment is good. The proportion of 19 to 21 year olds who are in education, training and employment continues to increase, from 44% at the previous inspection to 57% in April 2018, and a good number attend university. Senior leaders are progressing with plans to further improve these figures. Recently recruited specialist staff and personal advisers work well together to promote opportunities for learning and employment.
69. Care leavers in or who have been in custody are mostly seen regularly, and personal advisers work hard to form relationships with them. Personal advisers

work closely with other agencies, such as the probation service, to ensure that young people's transition back into the community is managed effectively.

70. Personal advisers provide effective support for young people who arrive in the UK as unaccompanied minors seeking asylum. They ensure that their cultural needs are met well through, for example, linking them with local cultural and religious groups. A summer school helps young people to develop their English skills.
71. Personal advisers and social workers provide effective support to young people aged 16 and 17 as they move from the children looked after team to Future First. However, in a few cases, the high turnover of social workers in the children looked after team and a lack of management oversight has led to delays in young people receiving the support that they need.  
(Recommendation)
72. Recent changes have led to an increase in the number of 18-year-olds who 'stay put' with their foster carers. However, senior leaders are aware that there is more work to do to ensure that all care leavers and foster carers are aware of and can benefit from the staying put provision.



<b>Leadership, management and governance</b>	<b>Requires improvement to be good</b>
<p>Since the last inspection in 2015, when services were judged inadequate overall, senior leaders have considerably strengthened children’s services. This is making a positive difference to the quality of help and support provided to children. Children in need of help and protection are now identified quickly, and support to them is reducing risks. Services to care leavers have improved from inadequate to good. However, the pace of change has not been fast enough in improving some key areas of practice, particularly pre-proceedings within child protection planning, early permanence planning, including children with a plan for adoption, and support to some vulnerable adolescents.</p> <p>Senior leaders, elected members and managers have worked diligently to address the deficits in services. There is demonstrable commitment from senior leaders and politicians ‘to get it right’ for children and families, including significant financial investment. Senior leaders know the strengths and areas for development across the service and recognise that the quality and consistency of practice require further improvement to ensure that all children receive a consistently good standard of help and support.</p> <p>Performance information is routinely used to ensure compliance with key indicators and to manage improvements. However, the quality assurance framework is not fully aligned with performance information, and the focus on the quality of social work practice is not sufficiently strong. Commissioning arrangements have strengthened, demonstrating a shared awareness of gaps in services and priorities across the partnership. A good range of accessible services support the early help offer and are reducing the need for statutory intervention. Action at a strategic level to ensure that the health needs of children in care are met has been slow, although recent joint working indicates that a more robust approach is being taken in response to a lack of improvement in performance.</p> <p>The strategic partnership response to child sexual exploitation and to those who go missing is well established. However, practice in convening complex strategy meetings for vulnerable adolescents most at risk is underdeveloped, meaning that information sharing and actions to reduce risks are not always well coordinated, timely or effective.</p> <p>The participation of children in care and care leavers is strong and well established. The corporate parenting board was established following the last inspection. It is well attended by representatives from the council and CLICK, who are effective advocates and strongly influence service review and design.</p> <p>The social care workforce is becoming increasingly stable. However, there is still a high turnover of workers in some teams. This is having a detrimental impact for some children, who then experience too many changes of workers and managers, impeding the progress of their plans.</p>	

## Inspection findings

73. Senior leaders, elected members and managers have worked diligently to address the deficits in services to children and families in Wandsworth that were identified in the previous inspection in December 2015. The improvement plan focuses on key priorities, and, building on feedback from Ofsted monitoring visits and findings from regular case audits, has led to improvements in specific areas, in particular the help and protection of children and care leavers. Focused work with partners has embedded the effective early help offer.
74. There is clear and demonstrable commitment from senior leaders and politicians to 'get it right' for children and families. As a result of the last inspection, elected members acknowledged that the span of control across children's and adult services was too wide and supported the decision for the director to have responsibility solely for children's services. There is now increased understanding and political scrutiny of children's services through the establishment of the children's social care scrutiny group. Their impact and influence are demonstrated by the decision to bring the care leavers' service back into the control of the local authority, the improved accommodation offer for care leavers, and higher numbers in education, training and employment. The scrutiny review of the 'front door' led to the establishment of the initial point of contact (IPOC). The leader of the council has approved significant financial investment to increase the social care workforce and establish an accessible and wide range of effective early help services that are reducing the need for statutory services. The lead member for children's services advocates effectively in council and is fully committed to ensuring that services for children and families improve.
75. The local authority now has a stronger corporate approach to children's services. Effective collaboration with housing colleagues has improved the choice and quality of accommodation for children in care and care leavers. There is now a corporate parenting board, which is routinely and well attended by representatives from the council and from CLICK, further strengthening the influence of children and young people in service review and design.
76. The director of children's services has specifically overseen improvements to services for care leavers, which now provide a good range of support that enables most of them to live successful independent lives. However, senior management capacity and oversight have been less consistent in some other key areas, for example in progressing timely improvements to achieve early permanence for children in care, including those with an adoption plan.
77. Commissioning arrangements have been developed with partners to improve services for children and their families. A dedicated children's commissioning officer and children's finance officer work closely together to provide a good overview of the quality and cost of services. A good range of accessible

services and specialist workers are supporting the early help offer effectively and reducing the need for statutory intervention. Inspectors saw good examples of 'considered' commissioning, based on sound knowledge of local need and taking children's views into account. For example, careful consideration of the ethnicity and cultural profile of children likely to live in the new children's home due to open later this year informed the procurement of the provider to operate the home. Further examples include the development of the 'crash pad' and independent living accommodation.

78. There is a clear vision and commitment from partner agencies to the early help strategy. Thresholds for help are well understood and consistently applied. Shared priorities, linked to a good understanding of local needs, inform effective joint commissioning in some areas, particularly with the clinical commissioning group (CCG). These services add value and are valued by children who access them, for example the counselling service for care leavers. The Young People's Health Agency, working in nine schools in the borough, provides psychological intervention for emotional well-being at tiers two and three, to prevent school disengagement and drop-out. However, there has been slow progress at a strategic level and insufficient impact on identifying and meeting the health needs of children newly looked after and for children who require permanence. This causes delay in progressing permanence plans for children. Working in partnership with the local authority, the CCG, as commissioner, has recently escalated action in response to a lack of improvement.
79. The strategic partnership response to child sexual exploitation and those who go missing is well established and identifies those children at risk. Representatives from the partnership understand risks and work well together at the sexual exploitation multi-agency panel (SEMAP) to prioritise those most at risk. Recent, improved multi-agency responses are starting to reduce risk and improve outcomes for a number of children, but for some, there is limited impact and they remain at high risk for prolonged periods. The specific SEMAP to understand and address risks for care leavers is a positive development, but it is too soon to see the impact of this.
80. Practice in convening complex strategy meetings for vulnerable adolescents is underdeveloped, meaning that information sharing and actions to reduce risks are not always well coordinated or timely. Work on contextual safeguarding is at an early stage of development, and there is only limited alignment and connection with key areas of risk, for example a gang multi-agency panel, county lines and criminal exploitation. Safety plans seen for those children assessed as at most risk are comprehensive. However, they are newly implemented and do not yet demonstrate measurable impact for this group. (Recommendation)
81. Senior managers have an improved understanding of the quality of practice. They know the strengths and areas for development across the service and these are reflected in their self-assessment. Through regular case audits,

senior managers know the children who are most vulnerable and have put systems in place to regularly review risks and the impact of intervention. This is improving compliance with statutory guidance and policy, such as: improved frequency and records of supervision; multi-agency contribution to strategy discussions in the referral and assessment service; the timeliness of assessments; and visits to children in accordance with their plans. Clear standards of social work practice now underpin work across all services. Supervision is regular and management oversight is improving, but it is not yet consistently strong across all teams, and this impacts on the timely progression of plans.

82. The quality assurance framework forms the basis of a programme of audit and practice learning observations. Senior managers acknowledge that there is more to do to improve consistency of social work practice across all teams, so that the experience of children is better addressed and interventions help to achieve positive outcomes. This remains a challenge in too many areas and across too many teams, and not enough children receive a consistently good standard of help and support. Pace and momentum need to accelerate to improve some key areas of practice, particularly early permanence planning, timely and effective work in pre-proceedings, and the impact and support to vulnerable adolescents. There is insufficient focus on the impact of social work practice in internal and external audits and peer review to improve the understanding of senior managers, managers and social workers of the quality of support and intervention and the lived experience for children. (Recommendation)
83. The quality and quantity of performance information have improved in most areas. Managers and social workers are supported by the performance team to understand the relevance of accurate data. This is increasingly used at team level to understand and improve performance in key areas of practice, in particular improvement in adherence to policies and procedures. However, performance data for children with an adoption plan was found to be less reliable during this inspection, and this has hampered the local authority's progress in progressing and demonstrating timely action in securing permanency for these children. (Recommendation)
84. User participation is strong, particularly for children in care and care leavers, through CLICK. They are effective advocates and are proud to represent children in care in Wandsworth. A plan to improve participation for children in need is in development, and yet to be implemented, meaning that these children do not access a range of opportunities to participate in decision-making.
85. The recent establishment of the social care academy in 2017 incorporates the workforce strategy, and brings together training and development, including the learning from serious case reviews, practice observations, audits, and feedback from staff, children, parents and carers, including complaints. The academy appropriately supports newly qualified social workers in their

assessed and supported year in employment. In addition, the local authority increased numbers over establishment to enable capacity to develop their own staff, which is a positive development.

86. Turnover in the social care workforce is gradually reducing. The increase in the number of social workers is leading to reduced caseloads. However, caseloads remain high in some teams and this is affecting the quality and effectiveness of support for some children. The high turnover of workers, particularly first-line managers, is having a detrimental impact on children. It impacts on the quality and rigour of supervision, resulting in delay in progressing plans for too many children and is a threat to further improvement to the quality and consistency of practice.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences of children and young people who have needed or still need help and/or protection. This also includes children and young people who are looked after and young people who are leaving care and starting their lives as young adults.

Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference adults make to the lives of children, young people and families. They read case files, watched how professional staff work with families and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care given to children and young people. Wherever possible, they talked to children, young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the local authority knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the people who it is trying to help, protect and look after.

The re-inspection of the local authority was carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

The inspection team consisted of five of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one Ofsted Inspector (OI).

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